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ABSTRACT

Two case studies of student writers of English as a Second Language (ESL), interviewed and observed over a period of two semesters focused on the ways that the students' different experiences affected their reflections about and attitudes toward writing. Teachers and tutors were also interviewed. The three students began the study enrolled in the same college pre-composition course. The students experienced success and frustration according to their skills and classroom environments. It is observed that the initial classroom experience with writing in the pre-composition course followed a model of instruction that discouraged both skilled and unskilled students to think critically, write to explore, generate hypotheses, inquire, and create meaning. The teacher of the second course acknowledged, validated and extended student's contributions. A review of related literature supports the validity of the "pedagogy of questions," of posing a few answerless riddles, which appears to empower both students and teachers in the process of discovery. (MSE)

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The Teaching of Writing: Toward a Pedagogy of Questions

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Teaching and Searching for the Right Answer

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The Teaching of Writing: Toward a Pedagogy of Questions

TEACHING AND SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT ANSWER

It was Paulo Freire (Bruss & Macedo, 1985) who first introduced me to the notion of a "pedagogy of questions." In an eloquent and inspiring talk, actually it was more like a dialogue, he explained how education had come to concern itself almost exclusively with a "pedagogy of answers" no matter what the area of teaching, no matter what the grade level. He spoke of "keep[ing] lots of answers in our suitcases," "forget[ting] the fundamental questions that stimulated the answers," and dispensing these answers to our students without bothering to address the questions that our students might have and without stimulating in them the spirit of inquiry (p. 9).

A growing body of research on and observation of classroom interaction has certainly corroborated the fact that instruction is dominated by a pedagogy whose goal is the "right answer," the correct and anticipated response, a predetermined set of competencies or objectives, fixed and uniform standards. It is not surprising, given this goal, that teachers tend to control classroom talk and instruction by asking questions, and that this pattern of discourse can be found in classrooms all over the world (see, for example, Holmes, 1978). Bellack et al. (1966) have called this pattern the "language of the classroom" and have identified the universal roles that teachers take on as solicitors and students take on as respondents. Furthermore, this classroom game discourages attempts to shift these roles, so that students rarely raise questions of their teachers and certainly do not do so amongst themselves. This is all the more striking when one considers the fact that children typically begin school animated with questions (Boomer, 1987, 10).

Typically, the kinds of questions asked are "test" questions whose focus it is to assess rather than to instruct (see for example Cazden's survey of classroom research, 1986). As Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Mehan (1979) have pointed out, teachers don't ask questions because they want to know the answer, because they

are seeking unknown information, but rather because they want to know whether students know the answer. Studies of classroom discourse reveal that "open" questions, to which there are alternative responses, rarely occur, while "closed" questions, to which there is only one acceptable response, is the predominant mode of questioning (Barnes, Britton and Rosen, 1969); that questions rarely require inferential reasoning or the generation of hypotheses (Mills, Rice, Berliner and Rousseau, 1980); and that questions seem to lead to dead ends, rather than build upon one another in order to arrive at a more complex understanding of an issue (Goodlad, 1984).

In second language classrooms, too, instruction has been found to be marked by such a pedagogy. Long and Sato's (1983) investigation of the forms and functions of teachers' questions in ESL classrooms indicate a preponderance of "display," "test" or "known information" questions which focus on form and accuracy rather than communicative language use. Questions like "Are you a student?" seem to predominate, while referential questions, which seek genuine information and which are found in real-world exchanges, are rarely posed. That this is found to be the case for both experienced and inexperienced ESL teachers (Pica and Long, 1986) seems to point to the inevitability of this form of instruction.

These studies, focusing as they do on the questioning behavior of teachers, reveal a "pedagogy of answers" as it is reproduced quite literally in the classroom. However, a "pedagogy of answers" obviously describes far more than who asks what kinds of questions. It is a metaphor for the assumptions underlying all aspects of teaching and learning. For Freire, such a model of instruction assumes that teachers and students play unequal roles, and that power and control are maintained by teachers. It perpetuates the notion that teachers are the knowers, and by virtue of this status, transmit information which students are subsequently obliged to display. It implies that learning flows in one direction, from teacher to student.

A "PEDAGOGY OF ANSWERS" IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

And it is such a pedagogy that still predominates in writing classrooms, this despite what we have learned from recent research on composition. As has been pointed out by a number of researchers, the universal structure for student-teacher interactions has carried over into the teaching of writing (Dunn, Florio-Ruane and

Clark, 1985, p. 47). Writing continues to be taught according to principles, guidelines and rules that are imposed from without. It is assumed that following a prescribed and formulaic sequence of routines assigned in lock-step fashion, one skill at a time, and practicing certain kinds of writing, usually artificial and narrowly prescribed, will lead to writing competence. Models are provided, criteria for evaluation are established, and standards of performance are adopted school-wide, system-wide, nation-wide and even world-wide, as in the case of the TOEFL writing placement. A "pedagogy of answers" certainly seems pervasive, both in terms of teaching approach and the kinds of written products students are expected to produce. In fact, an interesting parallel can be drawn between second language teaching and writing instruction; just as second language classrooms are marked by practice with predetermined language skills that is at odds with the way meaning is negotiated and information exchanged in the real world, so writing classrooms seem to operate according to the demands and goals of institutionalized curricula that fail to take into account the fluid, recursive, open-ended nature of real-world writing processes.

Recent studies of writing classrooms, investigations of teachers' responses to student writing, and surveys of composition textbooks all reveal the ways in which a "pedagogy of answers" manifests itself. For example, Applebee's (1984) investigation of how writing is taught in schools describes in depth the mechanistic nature of instruction and the kinds of writing students are expected to produce. Writing is used, by and large, to test, and the role the teacher plays is that of examiner. Most writing tasks are highly structured, limited, and narrow, of the fill-in-the-blank variety, and are sequenced according to a bottom-up approach. Even longer assignments are rigid and formulaic, with directives about the final form the writing is to take. Thus, students report with great specificity the form their writing is to reproduce: "The shape of the product—even to the precise number of sentences per paragraph and paragraphs per essay—has been made clear to them" (p. 105). Given the emphasis on convention and predetermined expectations, students' own purposes for writing are rarely addressed and are "taken over" by school purposes. Even in the case of two classrooms in which the teachers were determined to use writing as a means for exploration and learning, the larger school purposes for writing and students' learned concerns for the evaluated final product undermine these teachers' attempts. Applebee's concluding remarks suggest that

these findings have less to do with actual teaching practices than with roles adopted by teacher and student, roles that put the teacher in the position of authority. It is because teachers' purposes and their concerns with formal constraints take precedence over students' intentions that "meaning is preempted by the teacher rather than more naturally negotiated" (p. 171). As a result, what students know and what they are trying to say through their writing are co-opted by their teachers' focus on the right kind of product.

Recently, I undertook an investigation that consisted of a case study of three ESL student writers. What I wanted to explore was these students' experiences in different instructional contexts, and the ways in which these experiences affected their reflections about and attitudes toward writing. Thus, in addition to meeting with and interviewing these students over a period of three semesters, I carried out observations of their classrooms and interviewed their teachers and, in the case of two classrooms, their tutors. What this longitudinal study revealed, again, was the extent to which teachers define and control writing, reinforcing the notion that texts must conform to abstract and predetermined sets of standards.

The three students that became the focus of my study were all enrolled in the same pre-composition course at the time that I met them and were chosen because each represented a different level of writing ability. I will return to Carlos' and Nham's experiences in this pre-composition course, which were not typical of their experiences in their other writing courses, later. And while what happened to each of these students represents a unique story, full of its own complexities and complications, there were common threads that revealed themselves over time. Let me share with you some telling vignettes.

Carlos, who was judged by his pre-composition instructor to be the best writer of the three, entered his freshman composition course full of enthusiasm and eager to continue using writing as a means for exploring and communicating his ideas. However, he encountered considerable frustration as the semester progressed because his own intentions were repeatedly undercut by the goals set by the teacher.

The classroom sessions that I observed focused on abstract discussions that defined, in essence, what was appropriate and what was not. During one particular class, the discussion focused on a student paper and the extent to which this text met a set of criteria outlined on the blackboard. The discussion was dominated by the questions raised by the teacher, questions to which there were very definite answers, and to which only a few students responded. This

is not surprising given the abstract nature of these questions, which focused on whether or not this text would meet the criteria for a "controversial paper" and which were phrased as if the standards for such a paper were fixed and absolute. I point to this incident in particular because it demonstrates that instruction that is marked by a concern for predetermined kinds of knowledge, in this case, rhetorical knowledge which the teacher transmits to the students, transcends a particular technique or method that would otherwise appear to be innovative, for example, sharing and responding to a student's text.

My interview with the teacher further corroborated that his intention was that students produce certain kinds of narrowly prescribed texts. He discussed the importance of producing papers that followed the rhetorical formats described and modeled in the composition textbook because students "would need these to function in all of their courses." The following is a particularly telling statement:

> I have a kind of general uneasiness about controlling [students'] intellectual lives, but I've become less uneasy with that, and I do know more than they do, and that really part of the traditional expectation is that students get direction from their teachers. And, in time, I'm beginning to see that a textbook knows at least as much as I do, and I can get some direction on what to emphasize for any rhetorical component such as comparison/contrast or argument or process analysis.

With reference to topics, he talked about "tightening the reins." He explained that he "determined the format but [students] would fill in whatever they wanted." And when asked about Carlos in particular, he indicated that "he'll get through in a kind of mediocre way. He's not what I would call an intellectual, which is the stuff of a college...It's interesting that I know very little about him or about any of my students." These last remarks, that he knows very little about Carlos, but that he does not consider him an "intellectual," point to the very essence of the problem. In fact, if he had attempted to understand Carlos' own motives and goals, he would have undoubtedly discovered that Carlos wrote quite a few pieces on his own which he showed me but which he never felt comfortable sharing with his teacher.

My interviews with Carlos revealed the causes for much of the frustration that he was experiencing. He narrated an incident that had occurred early in the semester that had made a deep impression on him. It seems that his friend had worked on a paper that the teacher refused to accept because it did not have the requisite five paragraphs. Since Carlos had never equated the quality of writing with the number of paragraphs it contained, this event had caused him confusion, as did other aspects of the course. For example, he couldn't understand why they didn't write more. Note the following comment:

> This is a writing class. We're supposed to write a lot. Why don't we write in class? We learn things like finding a thesis, answering questions for a paper, but why don't we do writing? If we practice, we're going to master it. When I write, I just follow steps, but we need to practice.

He also experienced considerable tension because he was interested in writing about a particular topic for the assigned research paper and had collected a good deal of data over a period of several weeks. But he was troubled because he wasn't sure whether this topic would fit the teacher's requirements for a "controversial paper." As a result, the night before the paper was due, Carlos wrote an entirely different paper, one that he knew would meet these requirements, but one that he had no involvement or interest in whatsoever. Finally, when I referred to the class that I had observed in which the student's paper was discussed and asked Carlos why he hadn't participated, he responded with the following:

> I can tell you this. We don't feel very comfortable. I don't feel like participating. I know the answers, I know what he wants, but I don't feel like participating. I don't feel like. Sometimes if we answer, if we are wrong, his position as a teacher makes you feel like you don't know anything and you get afraid.

Nham was one of the other students who participated in my study, the least skilled writer of the three. Like Carlos, he had made good progress in his pre-composition course and looked forward to further opportunities to write, but his experiences in his freshman

composition course served to discourage him, rob him of his confidence, and preclude his development.

What is particularly interesting about the composition class that Nham attended is that the teacher wanted to promote engaged and meaningful writing, but in the final analysis was incapable of reconciling her professed philosophy with her need to have students fulfill the goals of her less explicit agenda. Thus, while classroom sessions were given over to small groups that commented on excerpts of student writing, it became obvious that students had little sense of the purposefulness of this activity. They seemed to understand that these sessions, in fact, had little to do with the ways in which writing was evaluated by the teacher. As the tutor for the course put it, "the group work wasn't effective because the final message came from the teacher." So, here again, a technique had been employed that was subverted by the traditional realities and expectations of the course.

During my interview with the teacher, she discussed her process orientation and her commitment to focusing on meaning rather than "doing grammar" or practicing rhetorical forms. She described the thematically-organized readings, the sequences of activities that led to final drafts, the peer review. She indicated that her goal was "to get [students] to the point that they're writing because they have something to say. At the end, I wanted them to feel that writing was not painful, that it was something they would enjoy." However, classroom instruction that focused on finding thesis sentences, the correct way to formulate introductions and conclusions, her responses to student writing, and the uniform structure students were expected to reproduce in their papers revealed her real priorities.

For example, for one assignment students were asked to read and write about a set of readings. They were also given an excerpt from an ESL composition textbook outlining the format for a comparison/contrast paper. Despite the fact that the teacher did not explicitly specify that this was the format she expected them to follow, this is indeed what she was looking for. Thus, when students' own intentions led to interpretations that did not conform to the pre-existing framework, they experienced confusion and conflict. In the case of Nham, whose paper revealed a sophisticated analysis of the readings and an original treatment of the themes but failed to meet the teacher's expectations, this problematic situation led to feelings of self-doubt.

My interviews with Nham demonstrate the impact that the

teacher's agenda had on his sense of himself, not only as a writer, but as a learner. By mid-semester, he began to reveal his anxiety and talked about having "tried so hard, but it never comes out right." He called himself a "stupid person who can't do anything the way she wants it. Since class started, I have not learned improvement...Next paper will be wrong, I'm sure." He consistently voiced his concern about getting things right:

> I get satisfaction because I'm thinking and getting my ideas out. But I'm worried because I don't think it's what the teacher wants. And when I worry, I cannot put more ideas out...Before, I just write down my ideas. Now, I worry about thesis, introduction and conclusion before I write my ideas.

He spoke of students' unwillingness to participate in class:

> I would assume that teacher is too tight. The ideas must be... She doesn't expect students have different ideas. It's not open for students to give ideas. I assume she wants students to have ideas she wants. That's why students have a hard time. For me, since I start this class, I keep my mouth shut.

By the end of the semester, he summed up his thoughts in the following way:

> I feel really inadequate. The way she teaches, it has to be correct. She's so tight, strict. That's why I'm not prepared for it. For student who is not concerned about introduction, thesis sentence or conclusion, that makes them confused. How to find these things before they have ideas. I know I still have trouble. If I know the thesis statement, my paper could be O.K....If a teacher is tight and won't let go, student is afraid to put his ideas. I have more ideas even, but I know it's wrong. The more information I put into paper, the more wrong. So I leave things out cause I'm afraid I'm very confused. When a teacher is so tight, you lose everything.

Nham's sense of failure and his conclusion that he has consis-

tently been unable to write correctly have left him feeling disillusioned and defeated.

The two composition classes that Carlos and Nham attended were quite different from one another. The teachers' stated philosophies, the design of the curriculum, the ways in which readings were used, the topics students wrote about, these features certainly differentiated the two instructional contexts, but these were surface features. At a deeper level, what both students (and I think it is important to keep in mind that they represented a wide range of language and writing ability) experienced was a "pedagogy of answers," an instructional model whose goal it was to promote and sanction a particular kind of discourse. As a result, when students' attempts to generate their own meanings led to less standard texts, their unique interpretations were neither acknowledged nor validated. Both teachers, no doubt out of genuine concern for their students' academic success, had subscribed to the notion that they know the kinds of writing students need to practice and master, and that it is their job to transmit this information to them.

This notion, which had gained popularity as a result of earlier work in contrastive rhetoric, has reappeared as a theme in some recent articles about teaching ESL writing. For example, Horowitz (1986b), after conducting a survey of the kinds of writing tasks required for academic purposes, attempted to establish what is expected of students in university coursework. However, his recommendations are based on the responses of only 36 of the 750 faculty contacted! Are we to conclude that his findings are representative? Furthermore, even if he had more responses from faculty, is it a given that we base our instruction on the kinds of writing assignments they design? My own collection of papers that ESL students have written for their content-area courses, and the assignments upon which they are based, points to the problematic nature of these assignments and suggests that we not view them as models to emulate.

More importantly, to what extent can collections of data of this sort prove of value to us if they fail to give us insight into the discourse communities which these assignments represent? Horowitz assumes that there are shortcuts to learning how to write academic papers, that we and our students need to simulate the experience of responding to a typical college assignment. But because this approach presents academic discourse as if it were a "unified body of literacy conventions and procedures to be mastered" (Coles and

Wall 1987, p. 313), it bypasses opportunities our students need to explore why we read and write in the first place, why members of a community gather together to produce discourse for one another. It thus "condemns students and their teachers to do the work of writing...in isolation from the very conditions that justify writing and learning to write" (Brodkey, 1987, p. 414). It is perhaps because Horowitz does not take these fuller contexts into account that his understanding of what is required to participate in the discourse of the university is so underconceptualized and stands in sharp contrast to what composition theorists have revealed about the nature of academic writing. What these theorists have given us to understand is that the standards of discourse communities have far more to do with a rich appreciation for and complex engagement with the issues of concern to a discipline than with the ability to formulate certain kinds of texts (Rose 1985). In the end, Horowitz's perspective is best summed up by the following statement:

> Many of our students...have been highly conditioned by the demands of their native education systems to see the TEST or THE PAPER, or, most of all, the GRADE, as the be-all and end-all of the educational process. This may offend some teachers' humanistic sensibilities and may, according to certain Western psychological theories, prevent these students from reaching their full human potential, but who are we to try to change the value structure of our students? And again, are typical American students thirsty for knowledge? Are we? (1986a, p. 143)

If we or our students are not "thirsty for knowledge" (the metaphor Horowitz uses here tells us much about his assumptions about learning), it is because of the instruction that Horowitz recommends. The solution that he offers may be the very cause for what he views as the problem. And solutions such as his, based as they are on a deficit model of education, according to which students are defined by what they lack, exclude students from the critical and fundamental understanding of how writing is used to generate knowledge. This, in fact, seems to be the case for the very students who are most at risk. For example, in a study of the way schools test and track students, Oakes (1985) found that students in high-track classes had opportunities to express ideas, while low-track students learned how

teacher had reacted during class discussions, as if they had internalized the role she played as an interested reader/listener.

My interview with this teacher revealed the philosophical underpinnings of her model of instruction. She spoke of wanting her students to explore their own thoughts because "it is critical to let students discover their personal ideas first rather than guessing what the teacher wants." She indicated the importance of finding out "what students know so that you can build on it." The readings she had organized around a particular theme were chosen in order to provide alternative perspectives since she "want[s] them to understand that there's more than one point of view." Much of the writing was never collected or read but rather offered her students "ways into the reading and writing." With reference to topics students wrote about, she indicated that, while she provided suggested topics for writing, the most intriguing topics grew out of the class discussions. She also admitted that she always allowed students the option of writing about whatever they wanted, explaining that it was essential that students "be involved if they are to make progress as writers" and that "because these students are beginning writers, they don't have the confidence and don't know how to write about a topic they're not interested in." She spoke of providing students the opportunity to do self-evaluations of their own writing development so they can articulate what they think they have and haven't learned and so that her instruction can better accommodate their perceived needs. Finally, she recalled her previous product-based teaching experiences which gave her far greater control over what students were to produce but with which she came to be dissatisfied, and explained that "teachers don't change 'cause it's easier to blame the students."

Interviews with both Carlos and Nham reflect the ways their experiences in this writing course affected them. Carlos talked about being able to write easily about ideas that "came from [him], not the book," about not being afraid because "all ideas are O.K. There's no right or wrong," about "writing for [him]self, not for a grade." He valued the freedom he was given to develop his own ideas and the encouragement that "made [him] willing to continue work on [his] papers." He referred to the kinds of questions the teacher raised in her responses and how he had learned to anticipate her concerns: "I can sit down and ask myself the questions that I know she's going to ask me." He characterized her responses to his writing and his subsequent revisions as a "kind of conversation between teacher and

student. It's like we're working together on the same paper. It's a kind of team. Maybe it won't be perfect, but it will be the best we do." (Note the "we.") Finally, he remarked that what differentiated this teacher from others was that "she is not only a teacher, but a friend...I can say she is also a student because she learns from us. Other teachers are trying to teach us something and forget about us as people."

Nham's comments echoed much of what Carlos said. Nham no longer feared writing because this teacher was "open" and valued what he had to say. He talked about feeling comfortable with writing and realizing that writing "lets [him] think, lets [him] learn, and lets [him] learn English cause you look forward to express ideas." He recalled hating writing throughout high school because his ESL teachers tried to "change [his] ideas," but that his attitude was now very different: "[This teacher] doesn't change my ideas. She follows your ideas." He also spoke of his own development: "You can't be perfect right away. She's calm. Lets us think. She lets us talk. That's how we learn. I feel I want to study forever."

It became obvious through my observations and interviews that what defined this classroom was not a particular set of readings, or techniques, or writing topics, but rather the teacher/student roles, the teacher-student relationship, and the teacher's assumptions about writing and knowledge and how they are generated. It was clear that in this classroom students and teachers were indeed, as Carlos had put it, a "team," that interaction both during classroom discussion and throughout the revision process was a kind of dialogue, that students were recognized as knowers, and that knowledge did not so much exist out there and get taken in, but rather evolved through negotiation and collaboration.

It is interesting that a number of recent ethnographic studies confirm that it is instructional features such as these, rather than a particular methodology or curriculum, that enhances and promotes writing development. For example, in studies of high school classes observed by Dunn, Florio-Ruane and Clark (1985) and Kantor (1984), the teachers did not take on the role of sole audience and examiner, as did the teachers observed by Applebee (1984), but rather were viewed as fellow negotiator and "trusted adult" (Kantor, p. 81). As Kantor pointed out, the mode of interaction between teacher and students, and among students, was more like a gathering of friends. The non-directive and open nature of the classroom, the focus on the intentions and purposes of the students, the encouraging

and text-specific suggestions offered by both teachers and students all served to give authority back to the student authors. Students were urged "to discover meanings for themselves, rather than trying to guess the teacher's agenda" (Kantor, p. 91).

Edelsky's (1986) study of first, second and third grade bilingual classrooms revealed what happened when children were engaged in whole authentic written discourse which allowed for exploration rather than artificial and skills-based tasks. Furthermore, when control was shared, when children chose what they wanted to write about, when what they brought to the classroom was acknowledged, children who would otherwise be considered "at risk" came to be viewed "as knowers, as doers, as people with linguistic...and conceptual strengths" (p. 94). Ammon's (1985) study of third grade ESL classes likewise suggests the importance of providing children the opportunity to write about something of personal relevance, even when, or perhaps especially if, these children's English language proficiency is limited. What differentiated these classrooms from the others observed, in which "language input...often seemed to be dominated by routine questions and directives" (p. 81), was the understanding that writing development involves producing written texts that are meaningful and important to the writer. Urzúa's (1987) recent research on four Southeast Asian children writing in English confirms the findings of Edelsky's and Ammon's classroom research. Her study underlines the notion that children have to be in control and have to be allowed to make decisions in their writing if their voices are to develop.

Yet another investigation (Diaz, Moll and Mehan, 1986), this one of bilingual junior high school students who were considered "poor" writers, likewise points to the changes these students underwent as a result of their involvement in writing about issues that were of significance to them. These students were engaged in a collaborative exploration of their home communities, work reminiscent of the research described by Heath (1983). They came to depend on and consult one another and took charge of the direction of their research and writing activities. As a result, control shifted from teachers to students, teachers becoming less directive and more capable of building on their students' findings, and students taking greater responsibility for what they investigated and what they wrote about.

Finally, in a study of a range of classrooms representing the first through the twelfth grade, classrooms which appeared to be quite

different from one another, Perl and Wilson (1986) found that what transcended these differences were the fundamental assumptions that teachers had about teaching and learning. The students and teachers in these classrooms worked together as a community of learners. Teachers were not focused on a prescribed and packaged curriculum, nor did they view themselves as the only source of knowledge. Rather, students were involved in their own inquiry and reflection, in writing that allowed them to think for themselves and establish their own perspectives. Rather than being asked to "recapitulate what someone else had said or thought," they were invited to "say and think what they had never said or thought before" (p. 256). And as students came to exercise their own authority, they wrote for and learned from one another: they became "readers, helpmates, listeners, advisors, co-inquirers, seekers of aid for their own work, and authors whose writing could, at times, have an impact on others...Together readers and writers taught one another what it meant to serve another's writing, to aid in another's growth" (p. 252). What seemed to characterize these classrooms, then, was a commitment to the idea that students are capable of exploration, growth and the making of meaning.

UNCERTAINTY, EXPLORATION AND THE QUESTIONING STANCE

Stepping back from the particulars of each of these studies, one can see very definite patterns. It is patterns of this sort that seemed to emerge in Applebee's (1981) earlier study of classroom instruction. This is how Applebee characterized the best writing instruction he and his colleagues observed in 300 classroom visits:

> In the better lessons, and even more so in the few that were really exceptional, the students were faced with problems that had to be solved out of their own intellectual and experiential resources. Often they would work together to solve problems posed by the teacher; this forced the students both to articulate their solutions more clearly and to defend them in the face of opposing opinions. The subject of the discussion seemed less important than the openness of the approach; what mattered was the sense that the students could offer legitimate solutions of their own rather than discover a solution the teacher had already devised (p. 105).

Here again we have come back to the idea of a pedagogy that allows students to work toward a "legitimate solution of their own." It is in fact such a pedagogy that seems to define good teachers across all subject areas and levels, as Macrorie (1987) has found. It seems then that in order to effect real change in our students, we need to leave behind the security, the certainty, and the control of a "pedagogy of answers" and refrain from what Emig (1987) calls "magical thinking," whereby we convince ourselves that what is taught is necessarily learned. We need to understand that "false" questions (Macrorie 1968, p. 6) result in pseudo-learning and lead to what Garth Boomer (1987) has somewhat exaggeratedly described as the "atrophying or retardation of the learner's brain power because most of the school answers are already known and known to be already known" (p. 101). We need to come to the realization, as Ann Berthoff (1987) has, that "nothing can kill a class sooner than to ask a question to which there is a prefabricated answer" (p. 33). We need to stop playing what Elbow (1973) calls the "doubting game," based on the premise that it is unlikely that students are capable of generating knowledge, creating meaning, thinking autonomously and imaginatively.

Instead, we need to play a very different kind of game, the "believing game"—which requires, according to Elbow (1973), inhibit[ing] your impulse for answers" (p. 176), "fighting the itch for closure" (p. 177). Playing the "believing game" promotes the asking of real questions and encourages all participants to ask questions; it allows for involvement, commitment, risk-taking and collaboration; it generates hypothesis-testing and welcomes multiple interpretations; it gives rise to explorations of the unknown and reexaminations of the known. Playing this sort of game means stepping back and waiting and, to some extent, not teaching, trusting that students are capable of impressive kinds of discoveries when their attempts are not subverted and their purposes not appropriated.

By challenging students with new kinds of questions and holding in abeyance our responses, by laying the groundwork for genuine research and inquiry, we enter a relationship that enfranchises our students as teachers and transforms us into learners. It is such a participatory model of education that characterizes a wide range of instructional levels and contexts, for example, the exemplary writing classrooms described by ethnographic researchers, Heath's (1983) collaborative work with teachers and their students, the elementary classrooms of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963), the experiences of

Atwell (1987) and her eighth graders, the college basic writing courses designed by Bartholomae and Petrosky (1986). In each of these cases, teachers gave up their power over and control of learning and with that, the notion that there is a fixed and authoritative core of knowledge. For Nancy Martin (1987) this is inevitable: "Once a teacher moves out of the traditional position of being the giver of questions and the receiver of right or wrong answers, there is no more certainty" (p. 24). For Freire, this is desirable: "An indispensable quality of a teacher is not to be absolutely sure of any certainties" (Bruss and Macedo, 1985, p. 9).

When teachers change their perspective with reference to certainty, another transformation takes place. No longer consumed by the exigencies of teaching a prescribed curriculum or searching for "proven" classroom techniques, teachers are free to begin to look closely at their students and to raise questions about why they seem to write the way they do. Since their students' attempts are no longer viewed as deviations from some idealized version of a text, but rather understood as reasonable approximations of the target language, in this case, written discourse, teachers are able to search for the underlying coherence and logic of their texts. And when they have trouble doing so, their students can assist them, clarifying points that appear obscure, articulating what they meant to say, providing evidence that was left unstated, removing contradictions, untangling prose. This is what happened when Nham explained the basis for his texts to his tutor, texts that were consistently judged as non-standard by his teacher, but which revealed complex and sophisticated interpretations. Shaughnessy's (1977) and Bartholomae's (1980) studies of basic writers and my own studies (1982, 1983) of ESL writers illustrate the importance of letting students inform teachers about their built-in syllabus, about their strategies and processes, about the rules and generalizations according to which they operate, about their intentions and purposes for writing. And my more recent collaboration with Shirley Brice Heath (in press) further demonstrates how much students can discover about written discourse when they are challenged by genuine questions about their work and when what they already know is sustained and built upon.

When teachers become engaged by and begin to explore what their students know, they become researchers. And certainly one of the most critical developments in recent work in writing instruction is the notion that teachers "reclaim the classroom" (Goswami and Stillman, 1987) and become researchers in their own right. The

transformation from teacher to learner and then to researcher quite obviously leads teachers to inquire into their own practices, assumptions and rationales, to raise questions about what they do and why they do it, to formulate and reformulate theories, to test hypotheses and generate alternatives. Britton (1987) points out that this research is not so much a matter of proving something as a "quiet form of discovery and learning." So, again, what's important is not so much the answers, but rather the process of discovering and learning. And it is important not only because of what teachers discover about themselves and their students, but because it parallels exactly the kinds of learning students need to be involved in. Thus, by researching their own practice, teachers gain insight into and have first-hand experiences with learning that is tentative, complex, non-linear and generative. Ultimately, this gives them the ability to identify with what their students experience when these students learn, when they use language, when they write.

Because a "pedagogy of questions" does not insist on the right answer, the correct method, the one solution, the authoritative stance, it allows us to more easily deal with the contradictions and ambiguities, to "embrace the contraries" (Elbow, 1986) that we inevitably encounter in our practice. Paradoxically, it is this confrontation with uncertainty and conflict that empowers us and our students. Unfortunately, however, it is a pedagogy of answers, based on "mimetic knowledge," knowledge that is possessed and transmitted by the teacher to the student, that appears to be on the rise in current educational practice (Jackson, 1986). One example of this trend is the pervasiveness of skills-based textbooks. In a recent piece in *The New York Times* (1987) Diane Ravitch decries this development in the schools, calling the basal readers used "dumbed-down" by readability formulas and "blanded-down" to remove anything that might offend. She points out that today's textbooks, influenced by widespread standardized testing, are focused on helping children

> take time tests, to fill in the blanks, to circle the correct answer...They offer school districts a uniform curriculum; a package of colorful posters, workbooks and teacher guides, as well as endorsements from reading experts. The intellectual level of the teacher guides is, if anything, even lower than that of the children's textbooks. They tell the teacher exactly what to say, which questions to ask, and which answers are correct.

> They summarize each story, on the assumption that the teacher cannot understand the material without the guide's assistance (Ravitch, 1987, p. 47).

Yet another interesting indication of a move toward a pedagogy of answers is E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, a widely popular book that makes the argument that in order to solve the literacy crisis in the schools, all children need to possess the same core of knowledge and then presumes to tell us "what every American needs to know," which is the subtitle of the book.

Freire (Bruss and Macedo, 1985) encourages us to combat these tendencies to control, to be secure, to be certain. He understands that this may be risky and threatening, for such an undertaking inevitably gives rise to questions that don't "correspond to the answers we already have" (p. 9). But, he assures us, this is precisely the point, that one must "get lost" in order to "find [one]self" (9), that exploring questions for which there are no obvious answers allows us to "envision what is possible rather than what is probable" (Britzman 1986, p. 451). This is reminiscent of Stevick's (1980) provocative thoughts about language teaching. Like Freire, he urges us to be willing to take risks, become vulnerable, experience loss, give up the role of "grand inquisitor" (pp. 283-295). For, as he puts it:

> Some riddles have no final answers. A few answerless riddles are still worth asking. They are worth asking not for their answers, since they have none, but for what we do in struggling with them (p. 3).

Perl and Wilson (1986), too, conclude that it is the struggling with questions that ultimately leads to genuine learning, and that this is as true for learning to write. "Insights in teaching and writing," they tell us, "often [spring] from the same source: the questioning that requires one to pause, to look closely, to think for oneself, to engage what [is] yet unknown" (p. 253).

And so I come to the end of my talk, inviting you to pose "a few answerless riddles," "to engage what [is] yet unknown," for the questions you ask of yourself and of your students will ultimately lead to discoveries and insights and, as in the case of all learning, to new questions that have yet to be explored.

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